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What could be more important than Montana's children?

Children are our greatest natural resource, and our best hope for the future.

Those words of John F. Kennedy are as true today as ever.

As the leaders of our state, you legislators have a solemn duty to care for Montana's children, to give them the support and resources they need to be all that they can be. There may be no more important responsibility that you have.

I don't think many or any of you would argue with me that our children are not important. Yet perhaps some of you dispute the importance of schools to our children's well being, growth, success, and happiness. Perhaps some of you are not firm believers in public education.

Again, a lot of people before me have studied this, debated this, refined this—and the resounding conclusion is that there is no better way to support our children than through public education.

As the bumper sticker says, If you think education is expensive, try ignorance. Giving kids the best chance we can to learn to read and write and calculate and create and make good choices is by far the most cost-effective way to support Montana's children.

Or put in a positive way, there is no better investment for our public dollars than public education. It pays off economically, since good schools attract good families who are the lifeblood of our economy. It pays off socially, since the support the schools provide reduces the need and cost for social programs. And most important it pays off for each and every child who grows up in this great state with the foundation they need to take care of themselves, be a productive member of society, and compete in the global marketplace that is ever more competitive and unforgiving.

I am the parent of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader at Irving School in Bozeman. I witness firsthand what goes on there as a volunteer teaching math for an hour a week, and serving on the parent committee, constantly fundraising to support what <sup>we</sup> consider to be essentials: art, learn-to-swim classes, the school play... I am happy with the quality of education my daughter gets there. I am not asking for more, extra funding. I am simply asking that the current standard of education is sustained for her and for her classmates and kids at all grades all over the state. That the school budget keeps pace with inflation, with growth, and on par with other parts of the country that compete for the same teachers, and the same families. That is not too much to ask, indeed anything less is too little. The governor should know this, and you should too, notwithstanding these tough economic times that challenge us all. Thank you for your courage and leadership to support SB 69 and 70.

